

**Testimony of Laurie Reisman, LCSW**

**Bill # 981**

**“An Act Concerning The Placement Of Young Children In Congregate Care Facilities”**

**Feb. 22, 2011**

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Laurie Reisman. I am a licensed Clinical Social Worker in CT. I reside in Waterbury with my husband and four children. I have been working with children and their families for the past 22 years and have watched children and families suffer the effects of mental illness, poverty, as well as the effects left by a child protective system that often does more damage than good.

I am particularly interested in Bill #981 which would no longer allow children under the age of six in a Congregate Care Facility. For ten years, the Agency I work for, Family Services of Greater Waterbury operated a Safe Home. Most of the children we took in were under the age of six years of age.

I do agree that children should be raised in a family setting, I agree that Foster Homes or Kinship care are the best placements for children who are removed from their homes but often, they don't exist.

However, this bill will severely limit children from being properly cared for, and also will separate them from their siblings which only leads to more trauma. Foster Homes are no longer easily found, and most can't accommodate multiple siblings. The Department does not support Foster Families like they should, and I say this as a prior foster parent, current adoptive parent, and the parent of a child who has gone through many foster homes, only to have no place to go at age 19. I took her in, and it's been my pleasure to raise her, with no help from DCF.

Take for example, “Anna”. Anna was placed in foster care and attended our Therapeutic Child Center. “Anna” was a very hurt and traumatized little girl. I will never forget the day “Anna” came to school with 3 trash bags of her belongings and a note from her foster parents saying, don't bring her back here. “Anna” had very severe behavioral issues, even at the age of 4. Luckily, she was able to be placed in our Safe Home, and she thrived. We made sure sibling visits occurred, and guided “Anna” through Meltdowns, aggressive moments, and sadness. Anna at 5 was able to join a pre-adoptive family. We worked with the family regarding what worked for her and what didn't. I had the pleasure of meeting “Anna” recently as she attends outpatient therapy where my own daughter does. She is now 14, my daughter's age. I spoke with her foster parents, who are now her Adoptive Parents and they praised the fact that we (a

congregate care facility) prepared them for her. Her rage, her hurt, the betrayal she felt, and her moods. She is now in a permanent home. If not for residing at Safe Home, this would have been another failed placement.

I have seen children as young as 2 days old, with broken arms admitted with their siblings due to abuse and neglect. Thank god they stayed together. Separating siblings is a huge mistake, and only causes more trauma. Siblings have a special bond, one which none of us can imagine. To live through abuse and neglect is awful for any child. To separate them is far worse. They support each other, and can maintain a healthy connection rather than worry about where the other one is.

My own daughter, Alana, entered a Congregate Care Facility at age eight. I will be forever grateful for how they helped her as well as my family. She is now 14 yrs old, and doing very well. I commend all the staff who worked with her and my family in teaching us how to care for her. Congregate Care is not a bad thing. It saved my own daughter's life. Today, she is participating in Pageants, and has a clear view of herself and what she wants in life. Without her Congregate Care experience, that would not be where she is today.

Do all children under six need Congregate Care, no. But don't separate siblings. The damage from abuse and neglect is so awful, and to separate them is so much more devastating. This does not need to be a law. Instead, concentrate on the Best Practices for DCF.

As a Parent and a Provider, I tell you if this becomes law, it will rip families apart. Congregate Care isn't what it was even twenty years ago. Today, it is kind, family oriented, and works with more permanent places for our children.

Do not let this bill pass. It will only severely limit services to children. I am counting on you all to do the right thing. It takes a village to raise a child, and sometimes that is a Congregate Care Facility. If you pass this bill, you will only be alienating families and children. I trust none of you want that to happen.

Very Sincerely,

Laurie M Reisman, LCSW  
Family Services of Greater Waterbury